A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

THE PARISH CHURCH OF FULHAM,

On FRIDAY the 19th of APRIL, 1793,

(THE DAY OF THE GENERAL FAST)

BY THE REV. GRAHAM JEPSON,

RECTOR OF THE SAID PARISH.

PRINTED AT THE DESIRE OF THE GENTLEMEN OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FULHAM.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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A SERMON, &c.

ROMANS xiii. VERSE 1.

"*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.*"

THE precept in the text, though addressed more immediately to the first Christians, is not temporary or occasional, but of constant and universal obligation; nor yet is the *extent* of this obligation always the same, but varies at different times, and in different circumstances; because those higher powers, which are the object of obedience, are not of a nature fixed and permanent, but partake of the common vicissitudes of all human institutions. We are commanded to be subject to the powers, that be; because there is no power but of God; but subjection amongst *us* signifies something very different, from what is required from our less free and less fortunate neighbours. The higher powers, in other nations are men, and the will of men; but in this the laws, and the King, as the guardian and executor of the laws. Hence you will conclude, that *we* have a motive of obedience peculiar to ourselves, besides those in common with other Christians; *they* are commanded to be subject only for wrath and conscience sake; from the fear of punishment and a sense of duty. To these *we* may add another motive, and that not light or trivial; the motive of *interest*: For our laws having been framed, not by our governors, but by ourselves, are constantly and

invariably directed to the public security and private happiness. And these purposes they so far fulfil, as they are either obeyed, or the infringement of them punished.

But if we look back to the age in which the Apostle delivered this precept, and to the persons, to whom he enjoined it, we shall have still greater reason to congratulate ourselves, that we are commanded to do only what reason approves, and what every wise man would do from choice. Our Christian predecessors, on the contrary, were exhorted to submit to stripes, imprisonment, tortures, and death; not only without resisting, but without murmuring: from the motive only, of fulfilling their duty, and with no other consolation, than the distant rewards of a future life.

The reason of this difference is obvious, and may be explained in few words. The government, under which they lived, was arbitrary, and the emperor absolute. The effect (which is well worthy of our consideration) of the excess of liberty, and of the disorders arising from it. The national religion, idolatry; and that, not simply of the Roman deities, but also of the several nations, whom they had united to themselves either by force or compact. For as these deities differed from each other rather in name, than in the modes of worship, they were all blended, without scruple or difficulty, into the religion of the conquerors; who, with great form and solemnity, when they besieged any city, summoned the gods of the place to come forth, and assured them of altars and protection at Rome.

The Apostle, therefore, considering well, that Christians had nothing in common with their fellow subjects, neither temples, nor statues, nor pictures, nor altars, supposed, that he could never sufficiently exhort *them* to be obedient to the laws in every other respect, who, in religious observances, could never comply with them.

It seems, indeed, to have been peculiarly *their* duty to be good subjects to their monarch in their civil conduct, who were daily affronting both him and their fellow subjects, by contemning those gods, to whose favour and protection they ascribed the extent and glory of their empire. But to transfer these maxims from ancient, and to apply them strictly and accurately to the present times, which have scarcely any thing in common with each other, is not only to endeavour vainly to assimilate things altogether unlike, but to pervert a wise and useful precept to the basest and most pernicious purpose.

The application, then, of the precept in the text to ourselves, as good men, and good Christians, is plainly this; that we be faithful and obedient to our King, governing us by laws juſt and salutary, and which, with his concurrence, we have enacted and sanctioned ourselves.

If, in endeavouring to explain to you, that we are thus protected by laws mild and equitable; that the constitution of our mixed government is, beyond the examples of ancient or modern times, admirably calculated to promote our welfare and happiness, I should deviate into political enquiries, more than I am either used to, or approve, you will be candid enough to impute it neither to affectation, nor singularity, but to my sincere desire of undeceiving such of you, as may have been misled by false suggestions, and artful insinuations; and of convincing you, that nothing is wanting to the public happiness, but to be duly sensible of it.

Firſt then, in every government adminiſtered by a ſingle person, the source of oppression must be derived from him, and transfused through his miniſters or agents. But the powers of this supreme magistrate have by our ancestors been so plainly and accurately defined, that it is not possible for him to transgress them, not only

without causing a general alarm and uneasiness, but without having his authority laid under new restrictions, and more positive laws, to prevent any similar grievance for the future. Even in cases of the most urgent necessity, when any law has been unavoidably suspended, however dictated by the exigencies of the ſtate, or the public utility, the advisers of such measures always esteem it prudent to procure an act of indemnity, even for the most necessary violation of the ſtatute. For protection alone, the power of the monarch is uncontrouled; because, in many cases, the height of justice is the height of injustice. But he can punish only as the law directs; and the law itself is, from the excellent institution of our juries, and the humane disposition of the judges, and of the people, always interpreted, as far as it can, or ought to be, in favour of the accused.

Nor can any criminal be confined, but for some attrocious and capital offence; in every other caſe he is dismissed on giving bail for his appearance, when he shall be called on by the courts of judicature. Nor is excessive bail required; but adapted humanely and judiciously to every man's particular station in the community.

Nor can the property of the meanest be invaded by the most powerful. Naboth is not compelled to exchange his vineyard for another of equal value, or to accept a pecuniary compensation: but every man's possessions are sacred; and, if the opulent will covet the property of his poor neighbour, he must submit to such terms, as shall be imposed on him; and pay, frequently, ten times the value, for the gratification of his convenience, or caprice.

Neither is any restraint laid on mens' religious sentiments, or worship. The established church, the several chapels of the Dissenters, are open and free to all: and they, who chuse to stay at home, are not compelled to go o any of them. The Roman Emperor's maxim

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is still observed; that the injuries done to God are the concern of God.

Poverty and misfortune have as many asylums, as there are parishes. The taxes for this purpose are equal to the civil and military establishments of many kingdoms. And the charitable disposition of the rich in general furnishes an inexhaustible fund for the better accommodation and subsistance of their distressed brethren.

Such is the government, which ill-judging, or ill-designing men, have represented, as tyrannical, cruel, and oppressive; and which they are labouring incessantly to subvert; or, as they call it, to reform.

I have hitherto considered the Government, as well adapted to protect the security, the liberty, and the property of the people. Let us next examine, whether it be less favourable to the national wealth and prosperity. For this purpose, I shall appeal only to plain and uncontroverted facts, without troubling you with any abstracted propositions; which are usually difficult to unravel, little applicable to practice, and always leave a suspicion of some fraud or artifice in reasoning on them.

Observe, then, that we are situated in the latitude of 51, in the southern parts of the kingdom, and the northern extremity of it in 59: which latitudes, in many parts of the world, are scarcely habitable; and, in all, are cold and ungenial. Wine, oyl, silk, cotton, and the productions in general of the warmer, and more fertile countries, those great sources of wealth and luxury, refuse to be naturalized in these cold and bleak regions. Nature has granted us nothing but corn and cattle, and these only in common with our southern neighbours. From this view of things, we seem little able to vie in our enjoyments with the inhabitants of France, Spain, and Italy. Yet, such is the excellence of our constitution, so mild and beneficent our

government, that they amply supply the niggardliness of Nature, and insure to us the blessings of every climate in the utmost plenty and profusion. The productions of these several countries seem to be cultivated, not for the natives, but for us; who import them all in the greatest abundance, and still find the balance of trade in our favour, when we have paid for them all. Liberty supplies every thing; that liberty, which it was reserved for the sagacity of certain modern reformers to find exists not amongst us.

From the same spirit we may derive, as from its proper source, that industry and ingenuity, which enable us to work up at a cheaper rate, and in a better manner, the raw materials of every part of the globe, than the natives of those respective countries can do it themselves: so that they are compelled to purchase of us, at an advanced price, what we had first bought of them at a low rate; and are supplied by us with what Nature intended they should furnish both themselves and us.

The culture of literature, to the improvement of our morals, and of our rational amusements, the daily progress in the polite arts, which are not only an ornament and embellishment, but, in some measure, of commercial use and importance, may be traced up to the same cause; that, in a free and commercial state, every faculty of the mind has room to expand itself, and honour and riches are the usual attendants on industry and ingenuity.

Having thus set before you the plain outlines of the national wealth and happiness, let me ask those, who overlook those inestimable advantages, and exaggerate those minuter imperfections, from which no human institution can be altogether exempt, what prospect they can have of overturning a government, which it is so much the interest of every order of the people to support and confirm.

For, as the power assigned to the supreme magistrate is for the

purposes

purposes of protection only, and, as it is impossible for him to pervert it to any other purpose; so is it too formidable in itself, to apprehend the attacks of a few male-contents, and too useful to the people, to be, with the general consent, in any respect, either diminished or impaired.

For, first, it is the concern of the Peers to support it, as the source of their honours, and of their hereditary share in the Legislature: and still more, because it is equally necessary for the preservation of *their* security and property, as of the meanest of their fellow-subjects.

Secondly, it is the concern of the Representatives of the People to support it, as the executor of their acts and statutes; which would otherwise be a dead letter, without any use or avail whatsoever.

Thirdly, it is the concern of the people at large to support it, because it is the only power, that can check vice and licentiousness, and secure to the virtuous the fruits of their probity and industry. The only power, that can punish offences, yet cannot offend itself. That depends not on the personal character of him, to whom it is committed; neither on his wisdom, nor his folly, his good nor his bad qualities, but is one steady, uniform principle, aiming, by means strictly defined, at one and the same end, pointed out and enjoined to it; the public security, and private happiness.

The expences arising from the splendor of royalty have been invidiously misrepresented, and set in an unfair light. It is the price of liberty and protection, and a very moderate price too. It is not easy to carry our outward respect and veneration for the supreme magistrate too far, so long as we confine his power within due bounds. This our ancestors well understood; and therefore were never sparing in supplying him with whatever was suitable to his station and dignity; having first taken such precautions, as disabled him from abusing it; and knowing, that, what they had conferred, they could

also recall, or retrench, whensoever the improper, or injurious application of it should render it either necessary, or expedient. And here let me further observe, that, as, by wise and judicious *restrictions*, we have precluded the *means*, so, by just and reasonable *indulgences*, we have taken away the *inclination* to do wrong. We have left room for ambition to expatiate in, without approaching our humble mansions. We have found out that great secret, that the freedom of the people, and the majesty of the Prince, are not incompatible with each other. And our security depends hardly in a less degree on its being his *interest* to *maintain* the laws, than on his *inability* to *transgress* them.

It is not, however, difficult to find out many defects in every human institution. But the defects in the form of our government are rather in its appearance, than its essence, and such as may be suffered to continue, without any material inconvenience, and, if reformed, would be of little benefit. Whoever elects, or whoever is elected, the persons so appointed are the Representatives of the people; have the same common privileges to maintain, the same common interests to defend. And I would have you particularly observe, that, notwithstanding the frequent complaints of the too great influence of the executive power, there has been no instance, within our memory, in any of those disputes, which sometimes arise in our mixed form of government, of one, which has not finally been determined in the favour of the people.

Consider the reason of this, and you will admire the wisdom and providence of our ancestors; and will have cause to hope, that the interests of the people will always prevail, in any future contest, as they have hitherto: since from the same cause may reasonably be expected the same effects. The reason is this.

The laws and statutes, how carefully soever they may be expressed, will, nevertheless, from the imperfections of language, be frequently

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of doubtful interpretation. But they, who enact the laws, are never suffered to explain them. This is the office of the Judges appointed by the King for that especial purpose. You might naturally expect, that *these* would be inclined to decide in favour of the authority, from which they derived their office. To prevent this, they are invested with their employments, not during pleasure, but so long, as they shall behave themselves well. This has rendered them independent; and men seldom do wrong from choice, or when their interests cannot be promoted by it. And, as if this were not a sufficient pledge for their integrity, they are controuled by twelve men, uninterested in the matter to be determined; and, in the last session, the dispute between the Judges and the Jury, as to the limits of their respective rights, was decided, finally, by a new, popular, and equitable statute, in the favour of the people.

Such is the fabric, that has been erected and completed by long experience, and the wisdom of ages; and rash would be the hand, that should take it in pieces, with the vain hope of modelling it anew. All the equality, that human nature is capable of, subsits amongst Us; an equality of laws, of arriving at such wealth and pre-eminence, as our talents or assiduity are fitted for, or our good fortune, which sometimes supplies the want of both, may enable us to obtain. Nor was the price mean, nor the labour moderate, by which our forefathers have acquired and insured to us these mighty advantages. They are the result of the counsels of wise and good men for the space of four hundred years. Nor of the wisdom only, but of the blood also of the best aud trueſt patriots. As the growth of liberty was slow amongst us, so its foundations were laid deep and strong; and, if any thing human could be immortal, this, we might hope, would be an exception to the common frailty of mortal labors, and continue, to the latest posterity, not only a monument of the

virtue of our ancestors, and of our happiness, but an incitement to other nations to emulate our example, till liberty overspread the face of the earth, as the waters cover the sea.

To conclude, Believe me, my dear brethren, we have much to maintain, but little to acquire. And the means of maintaining what has been so hardly earned are constantly operating, as well by the opposition in the Parliament, which, though not always conducted on the purest motives, is yet always useful to the commonwealth, as by the literary warnings of learned and judicious men, who will never be wanting to point out to us the remotest appearance of danger to our liberties, as well as the readiest and most effectual means of averting it.

If then, I have laid before you a just and faithful description of our national wealth and prosperity, you will readily join with me in humbling yourselves before the supreme cause and author of all good things, beseeching him, that this just and necessary war, in defence of all that we esteem dear and sacred, may be brought to a speedy and happy conclusion, and that the course of this world may henceforward be so wisely and peaceably ordered, that Christian love and charity may be diffused throughout the world, to the security and happiness of mankind, and to the praise and honour of ALMIGHTY GOD.

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